

The sky began to clear, and the hero soon realized he was not where he once was. Gone were the lush trees and happy sprites. There was no sunshine here. Bess of the Vale was nowhere to be seen. The Valley of Experience was far below. All there was here was rock, wind, and sky.

Suddenly, a voice boomed from above: "I am the Ward of the Mountain." The hero looked up, and noticed that the mountain's peak was higher than he had thought, and was veiled by brewing clouds. A flash of lightning and a swirl of the air, and a figure began to descend.

"Why has the mountain grown?" The hero asked. "It has not grown, your perception has merely shifted." The Ward drifted down towards the hero. "What do you want to accomplish?" The hero was confused; he just wanted to hike the mountain. "To be successful, you must plan the end and assess the path." The Ward replied.

The Ward led the hero up the trail, when they suddenly came to a deep crevasse. Down below were other hikers, continually trying to ascend the steep incline but having no success. "To go forwards, you must go backwards." Suddenly, the Ward disappeared.

The hero turned around, and realized that to continue his ascent, he must be determined on one thought: "I want to ascend this mountain in the most effective and strategic way possible." A path then appeared back a few paces down the path, and he followed it around and past the crevasse.

The Ward fell back in line with the hero. Soon they came to a foggy interception. "The easiest way is straight ahead." The hero determined. The Ward stepped in front. "It is impossible to see when the way is veiled. Clear the path." So the hero touched the ground and felt the air. He scrutinized and assessed the land around him. He spoke his ideas, his voice loud in the silence. He scanned the scene for clues and hints. He perceived the rocks and trees. He listened for music in the air.

The fog lifted, slowly but surely. What was revealed were a multitude of paths, all different. Some were straight, some twisted. Some were wide and some were thin. Others howled with wind, and others required exact planning to climb their boulders and cliffs. As he walked down the path he chose for himself, three small fairies made themselves known. One was a young son named Tom, another with arms as big and strong as trunks, and the last was a tiny little worm. But they all aided him as he ascended the path. All the while, the Ward watched from above.

When the hero exited the path, the Ward of the Mountain was waiting. "I see you made it out successfully. How was your journey?" The hero was at a loss of words. What did she want him to say? "It was sufficient." The Ward rose. "But what of the paths? What of your decision making?" Her face was pained with inquiry. The hero recounted his path, his trials, what he enjoyed, what he worked through, and what he just could not get around. "But I have yet to reach the top of the mountain." He finished. The Ward smiled. "You will find that the top will become clouded with each day. It is not so much about the terminus, but the ascension. Take with you what I have taught." The Ward flew into the sky and down the path. The hero noticed that she had begun making changes based on his opinions. And just as she did that, he saw a figure emerge from the Valley of Experience, as he had.

In fact, when he turned, he saw many others ascending the mountain. They were assessing their surroundings and creating innovative ways to pass large boulders and deep chasms. With each other they built on their ideas and planned decisive strategies that worked for them all, as they were all different. And after each obstacle they told those behind them what worked best, and what to change. So the hero joined in on their climb. He looked up, but could not see the peak. He smiled.